**SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCILLOR’S REPORT**



***Cllr* STEPHEN BURROUGHES - JANUARY 2016**

*Firstly, may I wish you a Happy and Productive 2016!*

* **FUTURE Financial Overview**

The Chancellor announced the Autumn Statement and Spending Review 2015 to Parliament in November. Then councils received the Provisional Financial Settlement shortly before Christmas. These are currently being examined in detail to work out exactly what the settlement means for Suffolk. However, at this stage, it looks likely that some councils will be under pressure to increase their portion of the Council Tax – some for the first time since 2010.

The reality is that our funding from central Government has already been cut significantly in the last five years. In the same period Suffolk froze its portion of the Council Tax, leading to a reduction in our net budget. Now Government has announced it is planning to remove the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) over the next four years – which will mean a significant cut in core funding by the end of the Parliament. Like many councils, the New Homes Bonus (NHB) also represents an essential part of the council’s core income – a fact that the Government itself recognises by including it in Core Spending Power. Although we knew we were going to face some reduction to our budget, this settlement is probably worse than we had expected.

* **Government Devolution Update**

On 7 December, Norfolk and Suffolk’s Leaders met to consider the shape of our devolution proposals and decide what more needs to be done before the final version can be sent to Government. Good progress is being made across all of the work streams, with ongoing support from civil servants. The leaders also agreed to start a dialogue with colleagues in Cambridgeshire to explore the possibility of closer co-operation with those councils, although work on the Norfolk Suffolk proposals will also continue as planned.

On 9 December, the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill reached its Report stage in the House of Commons. Some new amendments were tabled, including those relating to the role of the Secretary of State. The Government’s approach to devolution remains one based on collaboration and consensus, as in the case of the Norfolk and Suffolk proposals. The next steps will be to continue to work on our proposals, with a view to completing them in the New Year. We have also commissioned the Local Government Information Unit (LGiU) to run a series of seminars (one in each of the councils participating in the Norfolk and Suffolk devolution bid) to allow all councillors the opportunity to share their views and ideas on our emerging proposals, in a politically-led environment, as well as ask questions about the proposals.

* **MAKING Suffolk’s TRAIN DEMANDS MORE CLEAR**

Demand for new trains and more frequent passenger rail services on Suffolk’s railway is being made at a Suffolk Rail Conference during December. The Suffolk Rail Conference being held at Ipswich Football Club will see delegates speaking directly to the 3 short listed franchise bidders competing to run East Anglian Rail Franchise about the rail improvements that are required to meet passenger and economic growth needs for the future. These demands will include:

* new rolling stock
* faster and more frequent rail services between Suffolk and London Liverpool Street
* an hourly passenger rail service between Ipswich and Peterborough
* a half-hourly service between Ipswich and Cambridge
* faster line speeds and more frequent passenger rail services on the East Suffolk Line
* a more resilient service on the Felixstowe branch line.
* Improvements to stations

Conference delegates will learn more about the East Anglia Rail Franchise Invitation to Tender and the actions needed to ensure the best possible rail, franchise and infrastructure deals.

* **TRAVELLERS**

The ‘Call for Sites’ consultation, which was launched in September, closed on 15 November. It aims to identify land on which to locate three Short Stay Stopping Sites for the Gypsy and Traveller community. Suffolk does not currently have any sites of this type. The next step is to assess the suggested sites which have been suggested or proposed against the specific criteria, so the Public Sector Leaders’ Group can decide which sites to put out for consultation during December 2015. In February 2016, the Public Sector Leaders’ Group will decide which sites to put forward to the planning process, with the aim of having the sites up and running by the end of 2016.

* **TIME TO ‘GROW’ YOUR FUTURE**

An information session for aspiring farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs is taking place at to show them how to ‘grow’ their own future. Suffolk County Council’s Eastern Enterprise Hub and Easton and Otley Colleges are running the event ahead of the next round of applications.

The Grow Your Future programme is part of the County Farms Estate initiative, run by the county council, which is aimed at encouraging rural entrepreneurs to put forward business propositions based around agricultural or rural industries, and to take up a tenancy of a site within the council’s farms estate. The programme then provides business support to Suffolk’s based entrepreneurs who are using land within the county council’s farms estate to set up and run rural enterprises. Sites are between 10 and 50 acres in size and suitable buildings available and in some cases accommodation. For more details please visit [www.eehub.co.uk](http://www.eehub.co.uk)

For further details, questions or queries, please contact me at: stephen.burroughes@suffolk.gov.uk